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ABSTRACT

For the purposes of this study, which examines the upward mobility of educational administrators, "upward mobility" is defined as a function of a combination of professional attractiveness and inside sponsorship operating in a paternalistic environment. The study tested four hypotheses within paternalistic school environments: (1) candidates with more professional attractiveness achieve faster; (2) candidates with more influential sponsorship achieve faster; (3) candidates with more professional attractiveness are more likely to have inside sponsorship; and (4) upward mobility is increased by professional attractiveness and inside sponsorship. The study sample included 252 administrators nationwide. Data were collected through use of the Questionnaire for Career Development of Educational Administrators. The study found that certain professional attractiveness variables had a positive relationship to rate of upward mobility, as did inside sponsorship and paternalism. Further research is recommended on the variables of inside sponsorship and paternalism, and on the variables of competence, leadership ability, successful past experience, personality, and luck. (MD)

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# PROFESSIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS, INSIDE SPONSORSHIP, AND PERCEIVED PATERNALISM AS PREDICTORS OF UPWARD MOBILITY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

by

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## INTRODUCTION

In the fast-paced, competitive arena of modern bureaucracies, the enigma of how those at the top got there needs to be unravelled. Speculation exists about why success records, measured in one respect by rate of upward mobility, vary among striving executives, but no single, simple explanation can generate an answer to the mystery of why some people are more promotable than others, as evidenced by their rapid ascent of the career ladder.

Certainly, promotion is far more complicated than the assumption that "if we work hard, practice our craft diligently, and keep our nose to the grindstone, then one day we will be knighted Prince of the Pie-filling Division" (Silber and Sherman, 1974, p. 64). Nor can moving up in the organization be solely attributed to "looks, marriage or acquaintance" (Peter, 1969, p. 38). What is needed is a more comprehensive explanation for the phenomenon of upward mobility.

Unfortunately, a paucity of literature in the field of education exists concerning the concept of upward mobility. Educators seem to feel that "advancement is another change that can shake up the status quo. It is not the nature of the teaching profession to be promotion oriented" (Corrigan, 1981, p. 440). In fact, it is generally believed by educators that "a more competitive attitude might be harmful" (Corrigan, 1981, p. 440). With traditional fervor,

educators have considered topics related to competition or climbing to the top as taboo, lest the public consider them more dedicated to themselves than to children.

In this study an a priori theory of upward mobility was established. In its simplest form the theory may be stated this way: Upward mobility is a function of a combination of professional attractiveness and inside sponsorship, both operating in a paternalistic environment.

The basis for this theory of upward mobility is found in Kurt Lewin's (1951) "field theory," B = f(P,E). Lewin maintained that behavior is a function of both the person (P) and his environment (E), neither of which is independent of the other. Lewin suggested that "to understand or predict behavior, the person and his environment have to be considered as one constellation of interdependent factors" (Lewin, 1951, p. 239-40). Lewin referred to this totality as the "life space" or "field" of the individual. The purpose of using Lewin's theory as a basis for the theory of upward mobility in this study was to emphasize the weakness associated with allowing singular variables to provide explanations for so complex a phenomenon as upward mobility.

Lewin's personal variables in this theory include the following professional attractiveness variables (Figure 1): physical (age, sex, race, height, weight, appearance), attitudinal (interpersonal competence, aspiration for upward mobility, motivation to work, geographic mobility, regional

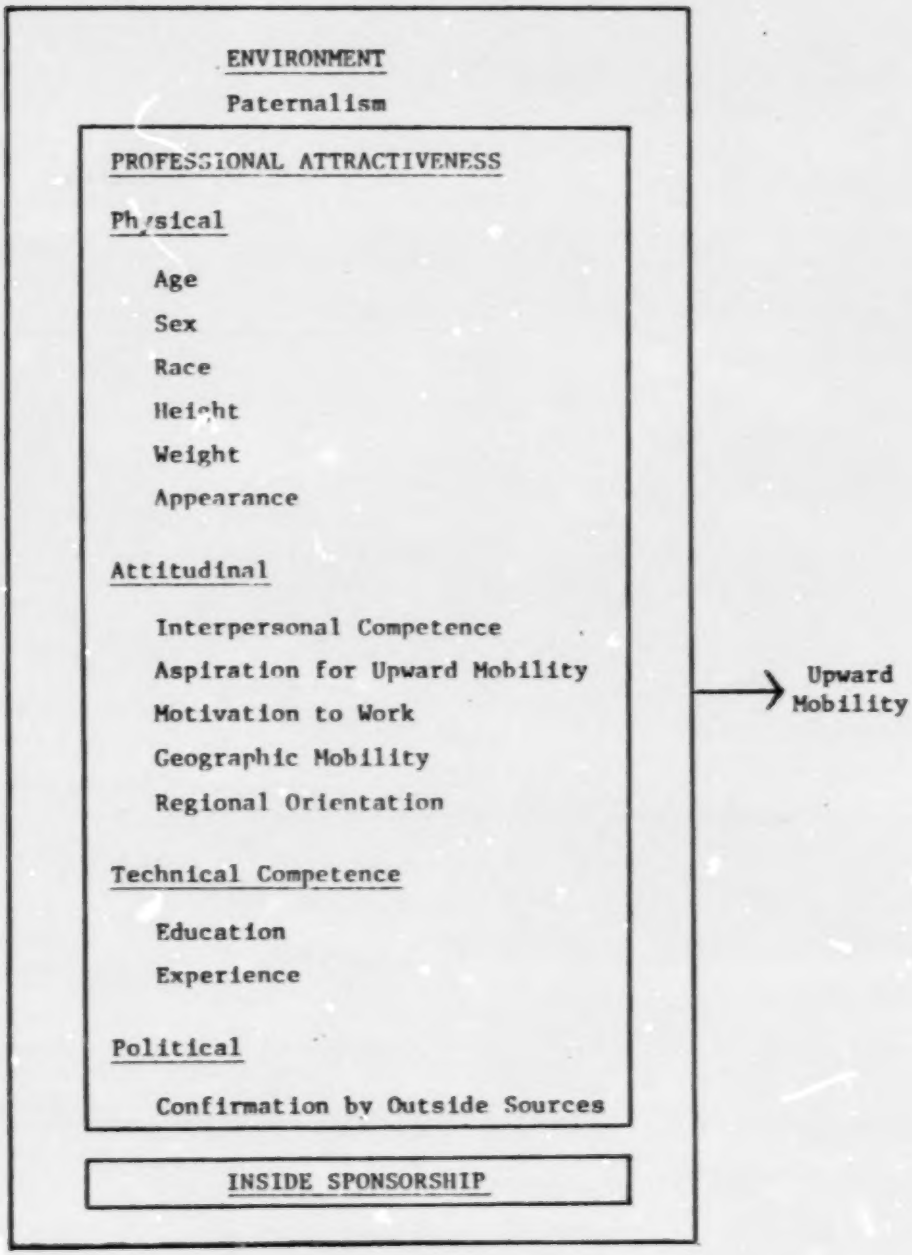


Figure 1

Variables Associated with Upward Mobility of Educational Administrators

orientation), technical competence (education, experience), and political (confirmation by outside sources) characteristics. Inside sponsorship is another variable which received consideration. The environment used in this study is paternalism, characteristic of all levels of the educational hierarchy, but embodied ultimately in the superintendent and the school board. The paternalistic environment is a part of this theory in two dimensions: (a) as an environmental characteristic of educational organizations generally and (b) as a force with varying effects on the rate of upward mobility of educational administrators, depending upon the degree to which its existence has been perceived by them in their experience.

## TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

The major hypotheses developed in this study were:

1. Candidates with more professional attractiveness working in a paternalistic school environment achieve faster upward mobility than candidates with less professional attractiveness.

2. Candidates who are more sponsored by influential people within a paternalistic school environment achieve faster upward mobility than candidates who are less sponsored by influential people within a paternalistic school environment.

3. Candidates with more professional attractiveness in a paternalistic school environment are more likely to have

inside sponsorship than candidates with less professional attractiveness.

4. In a perceived paternalistic school environment, upward mobility is increased by the interaction of professional attractiveness and inside sponsorship.

This study used two populations, superintendents and non-superintendents. The purpose of using the two populations was not only to test the hypotheses by examining the variation in rate of upward mobility among superintendents, but also to examine the contrast in professional attractiveness variables, inside sponsorship, and perceived paternalism between superintendents and non-superintendents.

The sample in the study consisted of 133 superintendents in Virginia, 161 superintendents nationwide, and 133 non-superintendents in Virginia. Of the 427 administrators contacted, 251 participated--172 superintendents and 79 non-superintendents.

Four instruments, combined into the Questionnaire for Career Development of Educational Administrators, were used to collect data for the study. The Background Information Form was administered as the first section of the Questionnaire for Career Development of Educational Administrators. It measured the following variables: age, sex, race, height, weight, appearance, education, experience, geographic mobility, confirmation by outside

sources, inside sponsorship, regional orientation, perceived paternalism, and rate of upward mobility (years to first superintendency). Not only did the Background Information Form provide data for analysis, but it also provided information which aided in describing the sample.

The second section of the Questionnaire for Career Development of Educational Administrators was the Modified Career Orientations Survey (MCOS), a modification of Tausky and Dubin's (1965) Career Orientations Anchorage Survey (COAS), and accompanying conceptually-related questions which measured aspiration for upward mobility. The Educational Work Components Study (EWCS) (Miskel, 1974) was part three of the questionnaire and measured motivation to work. The final section of the questionnaire was the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation--Behavior (FIRO-B) (Schutz, 1966, which measured interpersonal competence.

The Questionnaire for Career Development of Educational Administrators was mailed to all superintendents and non-superintendents in the sample, and completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher by mail. Usable questionnaires were received from 59 percent of the educational administrators originally contacted.

Analyses of the data included seven multiple regression analyses with superintendents. Four analyses, three analyses with and one analysis without interaction, used

years to first superintendency as the dependent variable; the professional attractiveness variables, inside sponsorship, and perceived paternalism were the independent variables. In two other analyses, one analysis with and one analysis without interaction, inside sponsorship was used as the dependent variable; the independent variables were the professional attractiveness variables and perceived paternalism.

Analysis of the data also included a stepwise (Rao's V) discriminant analysis to determine the variables which accounted for the greatest difference between the group of superintendents and the group of non-superintendents. In addition, responses to an open-ended question concerning the most important factors in upward mobility were tallied.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The data from multiple regression analysis support a significant ($p < .00$) relationship between the rate of upward mobility and the professional attractiveness variables. These variables accounted for 72 percent of the variance ($R^2 = .722$) in rate of upward mobility. The five significant predictors for rate of upward mobility were (a) age at first superintendency ($p < .00$), (b) tolerance for work pressure (a component of the work motivation variable) ($p < .02$), (c) highest degree ($p < .03$), (d) aspiration for upward mobility ($p < .04$), and (e) geographic mobility ($p < .05$) (Table 1).

Table 1

Significant Professional Attractiveness Variables
in Multiple Regression Equation for Rate of Upward Mobility
in Order of Relative Importance
(n = 105, $R^2$ = .722)

| | Variable | Beta | B | t | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Age at first superintendency | .854 | .795 | 11.552 | .000** |
| 2. | Tolerance for work pressure | -.178 | -2.399 | -2.316 | .023* |
| 3. | Highest degree | .158 | 1.016 | 2.227 | .029* |
| 4. | Aspiration for upward mobility | -.153 | - .900 | -2.111 | .038* |
| 5. | Geographic mobility | .134 | .379 | 1.988 | .050* |

**p<.01

*p<.05

The finding that it took fewer years for younger administrators to reach their first superintendency than for older administrators was obvious; the zero order correlation coefficient for age at first superintendency and years to first superintendency was .795 indicating that 63 percent of the variance in the two variables was held in common. It was also apparent from these results that the higher the educational administrator's aspiration for upward mobility and tolerance for work pressure, the faster was the rate of upward mobility. In addition, the results showed that the higher the educational level of the respondent and the more geographic moves made, the more years it took to reach the first superintendency.

The multiple regression data also support a weak, but significant, relationship between inside sponsorship within the educational organization and the professional attractiveness variables. Only 37 percent of the variance ($R^2 = .365$, $p < .02$) in inside sponsorship was accounted for by the attractiveness variables. One attractiveness variable, confirmation by outside sources, was significant ($p < .00$) and was first in relative importance, indicating that support from influential people outside the organization may be a valuable predictor for inside sponsorship. The relationship between inside sponsorship and another variable, potential for challenge and development (a component of the work motivation variable),

significant at the .02 level, showed that those who sought opportunities for creativity and responsibility won more support from influential people within the organization (Table 2).

The data did not support a relationship between inside sponsorship and rate of upward mobility nor a relationship between the rate of upward mobility and selected professional attractiveness variables interacting with inside sponsorship and perceived paternalism.

The discriminant analysis data revealed differences between the group of superintendents and the group of non-superintendents in the sample. The summary statistics for the six variables (aspiration for upward mobility, present age, inside sponsorship, perceived paternalism, present appearance concern, and interpersonal competence) that discriminated between the two groups appear in Table 3. Mean scores for each group on these variables appear in Table 4. The classification procedure resulted in an accuracy of 83.98 percent. Tau, a measure of the reduction in error over chance in classifying cases by using the discriminant function, was .6796. In other words, use of the discriminant function produced by the data in this study reduced the error in classifying subjects as either superintendents or non-superintendents by 67.96 percent. The eigenvalue for the discriminant function which is a measure of the discriminating power of the function, was

Table 2

Significant Professional Attractiveness Variables
in Multiple Regression Equation for Inside Sponsorship
in Order of Relative Importance
(n = 105, $R^2$ = .365)

| Variable | Beta | B | t | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Confirmation by outside sources | .390 | .555 | 3.754 | .000** |
| 2. Potential for challenge and development | .296 | .829 | 2.377 | .020* |

**p < .01

*p < .05

Table 3

Summary of Stepwise Discriminant Analysis
for Superintendents and Non-Superintendents

| Step | Variable | F to enter | df | Rao's V | Change in V | Change in V Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Aspiration for for upward mobility (validation questions) | 60.544 | $^{1}$/144 | 60.544 | 60.54 | .000** |
| 2 | Present Age | 40.876 | $^{2}$/143 | 82.323 | 21.78 | .000** |
| 3 | Inside sponsorship | 30.577 | $^{3}$/142 | 93.023 | 10.70 | .001** |
| 4 | Perceived paternalism | 24.691 | $^{4}$/141 | 100.865 | 7.84 | .003** |
| 5 | Present appearance concern | 20.582 | $^{5}$/140 | 105.848 | 4.98 | .026* |
| 6 | Interpersonal competence | 17.924 | $^{6}$/139 | 111.413 | 5.57 | .018* |

**p < .01
*p < .05

Table 4

Group Means for Significant Variables
in the Discriminant Function

| Variable | Group Means | |
|---|---|---|
| | Superintendent n = 129 | Non-Superintendent n = 52 |
| 1. Aspiration for upward mobility (validation questions) | 10.781 | 9.220 |
| 2. Present age | 48.867 | 45.024 |
| 3. Perceived paternalism | 3.881 | 4.034 |
| 4. Inside sponsorship | 2.233 | 2.603 |
| 5. Present appearance concern | 2.612 | 2.793 |
| 6. Interpersonal competence | 23.695 | 23.024 |

.774. The amount of variance in the variables of the discriminant function accounted for by the two groups was 44 percent.

Using data from the open-ended question--which asked respondents to list, in their opinion, the most important factors influencing upward mobility--it may be concluded that the inclusion of certain variables in the theory in this study which attempts to explain the variation in upward mobility may be justified. In addition, it may be concluded from these opinions of the educational administrators participating in the study that certain variables which were omitted from the explanation in this study may need to be investigated in the future (Table 5).

## DISCUSSION

Lewin's field theory (Lewin, 1951), the basic theory behind the study, which maintains that behavior (upward mobility) is a function of personal characteristics (professional attractiveness variables and inside sponsorship) operating in a certain environment (paternalism), is supported by the conclusions drawn in this study. The data revealed that certain professional attractiveness variables had a positive relationship to rate of upward mobility of educational administrators. In addition, data gathered from assessing respondents' opinions about important factors in upward mobility revealed that inside sponsorship and paternalism may also play a part in educators' moving upward.

Table 5

Results of Open-ended Question Concerning Most Important Factors in the Upward Mobility of Educational Administrators
n=234

| | | n | Percent of Respondents |
|---|---|---|---|
| [a]1. | Education/Training | 103 | 44.2% |
| 2. | Competence/Leadership Ability | 91 | 38.9% |
| 3. | Successful Past Experience | 85 | 36.3% |
| [a]4. | Deference to Paternalism (loyalty, status quo, cooperation, etc.) | 77 | 32.9% |
| [a]5. | Interpersonal Competence | 69 | 29.5% |
| [a]6. | Inside Sponsorship/Confirmation by Outside Sources | 67 | 28.6% |
| 7. | Personality | 66 | 28.2% |
| [a]8. | Aspiration for Upward Mobility | 50 | 21.4% |
| 9. | Luck/Right Place at Right Time | 37 | 15.8% |
| [a]10. | Motivation to Work | 36 | 15.4% |
| [a]11. | Geographic Mobility | 25 | 10.7% |

[a]Variables included in the theory in this study.

The relationship between rate of upward mobility and tolerance for work pressures, a component of work motivation, indicates that those who wish to move up in the educational organization must accept the often unpleasant, demanding duties and pressures which go beyond job descriptions and contractual hours. Since, according to this study, acceptance of job pressures and after-hours work predicted faster movement up the promotion ladder, candidates for promotion would be well advised to accept these discomforts as a matter of career necessity.

Since aspiration for upward mobility has been revealed as a force that increases rate of upward mobility, it is recommended that aspirants not be content with just seeking promotion, but that they actively aspire to reach the superintendency. By the conscious act of aspiring for the top, they may be increasing their chances of getting up the ladder faster. Informal responses also indicate that a high level of assertiveness or drive is essential for aspirants.

The informal responses by participants when asked to indicate the most important factors in upward mobility indicate several recommendations which may be appropriate for aspiring educational administrators. Since educational level was felt to be most important in moving up, aspirants might consider entering an advanced degree program or even pursuing a doctorate to make themselves more salable in the educational job market.

In addition, because of the feeling by the educational administrators responding that interpersonal competence is essential in moving upward, it is recommended that aspirants sharpen their communication skills and strive to handle all public relations situations with a positive, professional approach. Winning approaches in dealing with people are often evident to those who make the decisions about promotions.

Additionally, the informal responses in this study reflect the feeling that candidates for promotion move faster up the ladder by maintaining geographic flexibility; the willingness to relocate to pursue new job opportunities can be critical to upward mobility.

Also, because the responses of participants indicated that sponsorship inside the organization is important in upward mobility, candidates might find it helpful to learn who the people in real power are and to maneuver into their good graces by showing loyalty to them and to the organization. Candidates should also, according to results of this study, seek opportunities for professional growth and responsibility, since evidence of potential for taking the initiative and showing originality enhances chances of sponsorship within the organization. The relationship between confirmation by outside sources and sponsorship inside the organization indicates that it might be advantageous for candidates for promotion to enlist the

approval and support of influential persons outside, but close to, the educational organization in order to enhance chances of being noticed by influential people inside the organization.

Since the informal data indicate that deference to paternalism is associated with upward mobility, a candidate for promotion might be wise to recognize the signs of paternalism and, if it exists, work within the boundaries of a paternalistic school environment to enhance chances of moving upward. In considering deference to paternalism, a candidate should examine personal values and make a choice in keeping with those values. If the choice to defer to paternalism for the sake of moving upward is made, it is recommended that a candidate respect the superintendent, maintain the traditional status quo (i.e., the superintendent's philosophy of education), follow the rules and regulations of the organization, and gain the support of those who can influence the personnel decisions made by the superintendent.

One recommendation for further research is that the variables of inside sponsorship and paternalism, strong factors in the informal organizational structure, be explored in greater depth. Each of these variables warrants a great deal more attention if the mystery of what it takes to be promoted in an educational organization is to be unravelled.

In addition, further research concerning the upward mobility of educational administrators might examine the variables of competence or leadership ability. successful past experience, personality, and luck or being in the right place at the right time. Judging from the responses of participants, these variables, which were not a part of the theory in this study, may be important factors in upward mobility.

Because of the many questions left unanswered by this study of the upward mobility of educational adminsitrators, future studies examining variables which relate to and present potential explanations for the mysterious phenomenon of promotion within the educational organization will be timely research efforts.

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